Freedom of Expression and the Life of the Dalit Mind

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Under what conditions does freedom of expression enable the dalit to live a life of the mind? Does the foregrounding of the body and the elevation of bodily expression – whether it is in spectacular consumption or corruption – really help the dalit struggle for dignity and emancipation? This intervention into the debate which started after Ashis Nandy's controversial comments regarding corruption and dalits made at the Jaipur Literature Festival seeks to critique the very epistemological and ontological foundations on which Nandy's assertions were based and whose defence provided an opportunity for the elites to repeat the rituals of humiliation and subjugation of the dalits.

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The recent events in the socio-cultural life of India have had a compounded impact on freedom of expression. These events particularly relating to dalit issues have forced a section of the "socially vigilant and politically correct" elite to jump into the debate on freedom of expression. The urgency and intensity in their response has to be understood in terms of the invocation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 against one of country's leading public intellectuals – Ashis Nandy. What upset these petitioners most was the use of the 1989 Act against Nandy. This deployment invoked a range of reactions against this Act. Thus some of them went to the extent of calling it a "draconian Act". In such a reading of the Act, what was being suggested seems to be this – the power of legal expression has a suffocating impact on the power of intellectual expression. However, it is necessary to put the entire debate around the Act into a proper perspective.

Let me make an initial submission where I would like to argue that it would be unfair to evaluate this Act as "draconian" particularly in relation to an individual case. Individualising legal expression is problematic as it tends to gloss over the collective relevance of this particular Act. On the contrary, the relevance of the power of legal expression as an interim arrangement has to be understood in terms of the failure of intellectual power to tame the "recalcitrant caste of mind" (my expression) which has a deep contempt for the transformative power of mind. Second, although the outer expression of this Act looks punitive, its inner dimension has a moral significance. That is to say, it has resulted from the need to minimise the collective sufferings of dalits. However, since the concrete articulation of this expression lies with the individual from its reference groups, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs/STs), on moral grounds, it gives the members of these groups a kind of discretionary power to make moral judgments and leave positivistic judgments to the respective judiciary, while availing of this legal intervention.

Moral judgment is informed by the credibility that a person from the other caste has shown through his or her continuous commitment to the social cause of the underprivileged. It is needless to point out once again that Nandy, through his predictable as well as unpredictable creativity, has shown an affinity to the dalit cause. Hence, any legal step against him would be an unfortunate thing to happen. It is always important, at least for the dalits, to engage with public intellectuals publicly rather than legally. Debating Nandy publicly is important not for scoring rhetorical points through television debates but to reason out with him the theoretical problems that one may have with his recent expressions and the expression of some of his defenders.

Dalits need to take a moral lead and see that the opportunistic intervention by interested parties does not short-circuit their discourse. From this vantage point, we need to debate with Nandy that his recent expressions have deep implications for the language that can be used to describe the quality of life of the dalit mind. Therefore, what is at stake is the understanding and evaluation of Nandy's expression, particularly in terms of its role in linguistically situating dalits either in the "ecology of argument" or in the domain of "social ecology". Second, and much more important, it would be quite interesting to find out the quality of post-Nandy expressions and their implications, both for the promotion of a culture of public debate and also for harnessing the life of the "dalit mind" (right to think, comprehend, imagine, analyse, interpret and recommend).

In other words, I would like to explore whether these expressions by the

intellectual elites have short-circuited public debate and distorted discourse by resorting to authorial expression? Second, what impact can this "authoritative" expression have for the self-expression and self-realisation of the dignity of the "dalit mind"? In the beginning let us deal with Nandy's first order expression and the theoretical problems that are associated with such an expression. In order to have some grasp of Nandy's expression, we would like to proceed through the construction of an unusual binary between the ecology of an argument and social ecology.

Ecology of Expression vs Social Ecology

One can grant Nandy the advantage of locating the expression in an overall ecology of argument and its resultant expression. In ecology of argument, it could be argued that the expression of a particular idea (in Nandy's case the idea of corruption as collective entitlement) does not follow a predictable pattern and yet, in an ironic sense, they exist side by side harmoniously. Nandy's ideas, so his defenders argue, are creative but follow unpredictable routes for their expression. Let us look at the route from Nandy's perspective itself. His comment in the discussion, as published in the newspapers later (*Indian Express* 2013)

> Just a response to this part, very briefly, he's not saying the most important part of the story, which will shock you, and it will be a very undignified and – how should I put it – almost vulgar statement on my part. It is a fact that most of the corrupt come from the OBCs and the scheduled castes and now increasingly scheduled tribes and as long as this is the case, Indian republic will survive. And I give an example, one of the states with the least amount of corruption is the state of West Bengal when the CPM was there. And I want to propose to you, draw your attention to the fact that in the last 100 years, nobody from the OBCs, the backward classes and the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes have come anywhere near power in West Bengal. It is an absolutely clean state.

Now let us look at the way this is structured. "...it will be very undignified... almost vulgar statement... most of the corrupt come from the OBCs and the scheduled castes and now increasingly scheduled tribes...an example...West Bengal...in the last 100 years nobody from OBCs, SCs and STs have come near power...absolutely clean state." The main point which comes out is that while it is vulgar that most SC, ST and OBCs are corrupt, corruption is good for democracy.

As most defenders of Nandy have argued, irony as creative unpredictability then becomes an organising norm within the ecology of argument and expression. Since irony is unpredictable but creative and hence the placement or use of words makes sense only in unpredictability, the advice that follows from this appeal is the following: "Do not look for predictability and for reason, as such surplus expressions are ironically unique." It was being suggested that the expression has to be understood not as a moral assault on dalits but a genuine attempt to replenish rather than destroy dalit interests. It is possible to grant that Nandy's expressions are pro-dalit. Yet such expressions, howsoever creative they may be, neither help dalits escape their objectification, nor are they aimed at promoting the well-being of dalits. Thus, one fails to understand how this expression would help dalits escape their social ecology.

Creative unpredictability is desirable and is one of the formative conditions for initiating and innovating emancipatory ideologies, policies and strategies. At the same time, it could misfire as well. Human beings are creatively unpredictable, because they often are moved to act by a sense of unrealised potential in themselves or a sense of latent possibilities in their situation. Hence, suppressing freedom of expression could be damaging as far as the realisation of this potential is concerned. Thus, freedom of speech and expression offers us an opportunity to realise this potential (literary, artistic and philosophical, theoretical), often through personal experimentation. Experimenting with others, however, is not without problems particularly form the Kantian perspective. According to the famous Kantian categorical imperative, one refrains from using somebody as a means to satisfy one's end. Hence, by and large, in revolutionary practice, theoretical moves acquire historical significance only on the condition that they accommodate within their logic an element of creative predictability.

However, the debate on the freedom of expression in the recent context has provided us with an opportunity to discuss at some length the notion of predictability. Let me, using the normative rather than rationality criterion that Weber would like us to follow (Heller 1999: 247), understand predictability in terms of its social and cultural impact on certain groups, in the present case dalits.

There could be two notions of predictability – repressive and oppressive. In the repressive mode, for example, private as well as public employers have denied dalits teaching jobs on the predictable ground that the latter are likely to "misuse" the 1989 Act against the institutional interest.[1] One wonders whether these employers are using rationally motivated predictability to keep the dalits out or are they motivated more by the unfair prejudice that would deny even the "competent" dalit entry into the institution. Conversely, from the dalit point of view and experience deep-seated prejudice of the employers becomes quite predictable. In the final analysis, mutually exclusive forms of predictability would become repressive to dalits who cannot realise their self-expression.

Predictability could also acquire an oppressive form in that it would give dalits a low sense of their intellectual worth. This is clear when the non-dalit, controlling dalit cultural resources, ignores dalits because, in the former's perception, the latter are predictably emotional and hagiographic and hence need not be invited, for example, to talk of Ambedkar. This denial is morally oppressive. Moreover, using creativity to make certain people pathologically predictable is self-defeating intellectual activism.

In the context of the dalit question, "social ecology" in the specific sense, and not in the established sense (Guha 1994: 5), is basically the politically structured conditions in which a particular group is perceived as the "other" with a description that belongs to the logical class of negative or grotesque language. It becomes grotesque precisely because it inhabits "deformed", degenerated, disgusting and dispensable objects and

objectified bodies. Further, social ecology makes dirt and filth an existential companion of dalits who are at the receiving end of condescending descriptions of the former across time and space. Hence, dalits, whose existential companion is "dirt" and "filth", are often the recipients of condescending descriptions.

In the middle caste/class perception, dalits are accessed as a moving moral menace. The grotesque nature of such an ecological understanding gets further accentuated when this urban middle caste/class perceives these locations as the source of physical dirt and moral danger. Thus, in the social construction of ecology dalits become dirt and dirt is them. The upper caste imagination thus eliminates the fault line between dirt and dignity on the one hand, severing quality from life on the other. Thus, the social production of such an ecology firmly establishes an ontological link between the dalit and the context (social ecology) of grotesque description. Continuous reproduction of this social ecology makes some of them sceptical about the suggestion made by de Souza (2013) who has argued for delinking expression from location.

In the dalit perception popular culture,[2] particularly music and literature, represents corruption as "moral dirt" and hence a part of the social ecology that surrounds dalits. Dalits themselves have their own moral universe, hence they put a premium on the normative question: "what are they?" rather than "what do they have that counts"? Democratisation of corruption or corruption as a collective entitlement, therefore, would be significant not in the first but certainly in the second instance.

Dalits have developed their own self-description of being a morally integrated self: a Buddhist who follows the Buddhist "*Arya Astangik Marga*" (The eightfold ethical path). Such self-description is based on values that are intrinsic to the self. This is radically different from the liberal notion of a "self-made" self. Arguably, the self-made self has an extrinsic quantifiable, measurable value or price that can be gained by any scrupulous means. Thus, Nandy's prescription of corruption as ideal not only pushes the dalit into the framework of a negative language but it also does not pay any attention to the congruence between self-perception and self-expression of the dalit. Second order explanations offered by Nandy's defenders seem to be compounded with much greater ethical problems. This problem could be defined in terms of the dominant assumption that seeks to individualise expression as self-possession.

Individualising Expression as an Ethical Problem

In a liberal democratic framework, one is free to defend another's right to freedom of expression conditionally and even unconditionally. Thus one must not take any objection to the intervention made by others in Nandy's favour. This is the question of political solidarity which is so important in the age of intolerance. However, freedom of expression becomes problematic once it is converted into the matter of self-possession or a semiotic property that has to be defended at any cost. This right to individualise expression sometimes may create a tension between expression as self-possession and its public articulation. At one level, expression does become a semiotic property inasmuch as it is taken to be a biological resource which has its origin and sustenance in the corporeal individual. Expression also remains individual as long as one is talking to oneself, for example, in an isolated place like an island. On the decibel scale, one can also measure the individual's physical power of expression.

Thus, expression in itself may be powerful, but it acquires social power only when it is articulated in public. Expression, in order to become socially relevant if not powerful, has to have a reference point outside itself. This outside is constitutive of an ethically sound social condition. That is to say, those who are speaking or expressing need to have listeners who are ready to listen to even strident or grotesque speech that belongs to the social ecology as defined earlier. In short, ethics of ears or ethics of listening is a precondition to the right to decent expression. It is here that the freedom of expression becomes a social right. Thus, expression as an individual possession loses its grounds of validity the moment it depends on another for its articulation. The tradition of *Rudali* in Rajasthan could be one tragic example of such expression. Since it depends on the other for its articulation, it is morally mandatory to be sensitive to others' moral/ethical well-being. To make one's interlocutors an equal partner in the collective project of transformation, one needs to make sure that our interlocutor sees the world in the same way as we do, so that our expressions do not stand out as unpredictable (Durrheim 2012: 190). It is at this level that the individual transcends his or hers individual boundaries and becomes social.

Good speech, therefore, would constitute the corrective capacity that a speaker has to adopt. The moral need to correct one's speech is also the act to affirm the right to speak for another community about whom the speech seems to have taken a perceived grotesque turn. Expression as self-possession, if pushed into the service of self-regarding intellectual interests, has a tendency to eliminate the possibility of inner legislation informed by the historical need to think with those in question. Internal legislation leading to moderation in speech has a bearing on our corrective capacity. Similarly one should not be averse to reflective expression just because it is likely to destroy the condition of the possibility of generating knowledge (William 1999: 186).

Further, it is important to keep in focus that for producing an ethically sound expression, it is necessary to privilege collective stature over social status that one has achieved through settled social confidence. Remember, reflective expression can unsettle social confidence and can damage social status. Reflective consciousness necessarily generates within a person, particularly those with surplus social confidence, a sense of humility (if not humiliation). Thus, it might adversely affect the social status of a person, particularly that status which is based on self-obsession with one's own expression. Reflective expression, besides being helpful in refining intellectual insights, also offers a promise to elevate the social stature of human beings. Social stature

is much closer to human dignity than social status (Kateb 2011:9). Reflective expression, at another level, also performs an important function inasmuch as it tends to undercut the moral significance of the "unified expression", which in its drive for self-righteousness and rationality could be quite repressive.

Unified vs Emerging Expression

Interestingly the fall out of this "unified expression" is the production of a new social identity, or in Bourdieu's language a "scholastic habitus" (Bourdieu 2010: 81). This new social identity then, in a collective manner, produces a bogey of shared complaints against dalits as emotionally intolerant, making them intellectually immature and hence infantile, epistemologically breathless; meaning those who, according to the former, lacked necessary intellectual insight into understanding, analysing and interpreting the creative unpredictability in Nandy's speech. Some of his defenders, thus, have set new norms and, by implication, portray themselves as the shared reference group, particularly for dalits who, therefore, are expected to follow the norms of appreciation and intellectual protocols of evaluation laid down by the former. How does one look at the claims for freedom of expression made by such a new social identity? Does this new social identity promise us, as Charles Taylor suggested (1997: 258), a positive conception of freedom of expression that would open up spaces for subaltern expressions? How can one look at the role of this new social identity in terms of enriching the life of mind. In this regard, it is necessary to theoretically debate the question of the freedom of expression, particularly in the context of the elite struggle for right to freedom of expression. As a part of this exercise, let me look at the role of the new elites in terms of the morphology of expression.

Talk-in-Action: Social Morphology of Expression

While talking about freedom of expression, one has to also take on board the morphology of expression that can be understood in terms of an act of talking that plays out differently. First, an act of "talking to" assumes an ideal communicative context within which expression does not acquire an offensive form, since it assigns equal consideration to those with whom one is talking to. In this context, mutual presence is a necessary requirement. That is to say, one cannot "talk to" those who are absent from the context. The absence thus creates the ground for an act of "talking for".

Second, "talking for" could have two intersecting routes. At one level, "talking for" could remain a pure intellectual act and would take the form of either teaching or prescribing to others. But, it could also be objectionable on moral grounds as one gets supplemented in expression that has a bearing on the latter, in the present context the dalit. For example, an expression that sought to prescribe the "ideal of corruption" to the dalit constitutes a morally problematic act as it does not respect the self-perception of those about whom one is expressing one's views. The third person expression is morally problematic as it treats the first person as lacking expressive and perceptive capacity to decide one's own life plan. Moreover, those who are suggesting this ideal of corruption to dalits, in fact, are indirectly suggesting that this ideal is not universally replicable, because the prescribers themselves may have fought against corruption both as an idea as well as a specific practice. Thus, it is quite discriminatory to suggest to others something that one is not doing oneself. The bracketing of one section with the ideal that is not universally imitable constitutes humiliation.

Similarly, rituals of repetition of expression also involve humiliation. These rituals of expression do make regular appearances in Hindi films. For example, the expression "Chandala" has so frequently been used in several movies by directors who find no problem with such expression. Similarly, in a Hindi movie *Aarakshan*, many found the repetitive expressions against reservation to be innocent. But are these expressions in Hindi cinema innocent? These expressions do not hang in the air. On the contrary, they are ontologically anchored in the dalit as a concrete being. Similarly, the expression "Chandala" is genealogically related to the contemporary dalits (Parasher Sen 2006). The word "Chandala" can still work as a repository of the anger of the socially dominant castes in India. To put it differently, this word works as the shock absorber for the socially dominant. The speech that is laboured through repeated expression, in effect, sends a constant reminder to its social target, thus unleashing moral injuries on the latter.

The rituals of expression have the function of hitting their social target accurately. The humiliating effect of this repetitive expression was visible in the relaxed body language of the adversaries of the reservation system. The anti-reservationist would derive a designated empowerment through these repetitive anti-reservation expressions. The power of dominant expression acquires salience because it reverberates each time the expression is repeated.

Third, an act of "talking about" seems to be morally problematic as it acquires a gossip mode. Of course, gossip in the subaltern framework is among the weapons of the weak. In the present context, gossip is the weapon of the strong. The gossip discourse which is prominent in some of India's metros does involve the consumption of the dalit as the comic figure in an in-house performitivity. Finally, at the last layer of this morphology of expression it is an act of "talking down". Many will not hesitate to accept that "talking down" is potentially authoritative in nature. The perfomitivity of this authoritative expression suggests that dalits need to listen to the authorial voices without daring to lift their head and talk back. What is intended in such expression is to induce a repressive silence through deceitful prescriptions, if not indictment.

Aggressive "talking down" can lead to a negative sense of self-possession which is qualitatively different from the one mentioned above. By this term I mean the awareness of oneself as susceptible to intimidation and mental capture. One withdraws into oneself, if one is not to confirm to the authoritative dictation that was underpinning this "talking down". It smacks of cultural coercion which, in an ironic sense, leads to the denial of the freedom of expression to the underdogs. Surprisingly, in the

expressions that are available in the pro-Nandy petition being circulated on the web such aggressive talking down to the dalit is very much louder. Let me cite a few illustrations here. Some of these expressions accused dalits of lacking the capacity of listening or hearing.

Dalits have been quite energetic in reacting to the Nandy controversy. Nandy himself, may not have had much control over the expression of his defenders. He is aware about the surplus use of language that is a part of his creative unpredictability. But from this, it should not follow that his friends feel intellectually and perhaps socially confident so as to overstep and condemn dalits as beyond any hermeneutic redemption. Put rather harshly, in such a reading the dalit gets projected as an emotional self who then becomes pathologically predictable. Dalits have been trying to fight this humiliating description. On a positive note, they have been fighting the intellectual battle to gain hold of their self-description.

Dalit Moral Struggles for the Life of Mind

The dalit moral struggle therefore is to negate this social ecology and move away from it to join the public sphere, where they can realise the life of the mind. Their struggle is to move away from the sensational to the intellectual sphere. To put it differently, their struggle is to move away from the real to the ideal. This journey was one where we would hear, in college, the story that Ambedkar felt upset after listening to stories of corrupt dalits.[3] The "ideal of corruption" denies dalits access to this moral history.

We need to acknowledge the struggle of such dalits, who refuse to acquire status through corruption which destroys their moral stature, as the intrinsically valuable being. Corruption might help a few dalits express themselves in the sensible world through bodies that are externally augmented through the market – gold and diamonds and other assets. However, this material conception of the body would necessarily prevent them from expressing their mind in the intelligible world – the world where one can enjoy the life of the mind. The dalit struggle fundamentally involves the human intellectual efforts to restore a morally rich expression to their actually lived life. This struggle thus could be seen as posing a serious challenge to the dichotomous construction of expression – thus prescribing to dalits their expression through the body, while retaining to themselves a more sacred or canonised expression through mind.

To put it differently, such constructions of dichotomy suggest the following – expressions produced through the body are specific to the dalit, while expressions produced through the mind are related to the urban elite. Those who privileged the mind over the body, or reason over emotions, need to appreciate what the dalits have to say about this mind-body dichotomy. Paraphrasing Ambedkar, they would then say "It may be in your interest to prescribe to us an expression through the body, but how can it be in our interest to deny the expression through the mind"? The prescription that dalits should not lag behind in reaping the benefits that accrue from "leakage democracy", if not corrupt democracy, would push the dalits to express themselves only through the body, leaving the life of the mind to the urban elite. However, it is erroneous to treat social ecology as the location of the body and the ecology of argument as the sphere of the mind.

Taking a cue from Bourdieu (xvi) we need to make an argument in favour of the life of the dalit mind, which is intimately linked to the epistemological break from social ecology. In fact, it is itself an epistemological break from this social ecology. An autonomous and non-objectified life of mind provides dalits an opportunity to seek this epistemological break. To put it simply, dalits need to make more efforts to come out from the Platonic "dark hole" and enjoy the sunshine as offered by the intelligible world. It is in this sense that an epistemological break is also a social break. They should assert that their life of mind is much richer and, ironically, more enduring as they are pushed into this social ecology continuously. Hence it is in their interest to debate the question at a much higher level.

There are already attempts in this regard.[4] Let us invite dalits, on a priority basis, to intensify their intellectual struggle to seek this break. I am already suggesting that dalits do resist seeking such a break from the "social". Social here has to be understood in terms of an inner dynamics of dalit intellectual life.

Internal Censorship within Dalit Intellectual Life

Let me briefly unfold some of the internal challenges that dalits have to face while carrying out their struggle for the life of mind. The first challenge that dalits needs to take up is to do "moral violence" with the self to empty out all the inhibitions that prevent the internal growth of their self-confidence. Self-confidence is key to taking the rights of the mind seriously. Lack of self-confidence or the possession of symbolic social confidence would lead to an elimination of the possibility of authentic self-expression, which in turn is based on the ethical stamina to remain available to self-interrogation.

In the Indian context the "social" does not limit itself to a particular community. It covers an entire range of social groups that are constitutive of different castes groups. But this ethics of listening forms only half the condition of good speech. It does not follow that these conditions are enough for good speech. The other half of the conditions that are necessary for good speech are the ethics of speaking. Causing violence through negative attribution violates the ethics of speaking. This is true across castes and within the caste. Hence dalit castes are no exception to this. Even Ambedkar was himself the recipient of such bad-mouthing by his opponents from his own immediate caste – the Mahar caste.[5]

In contemporary times, some dalits, on a number of occasions, actively suppress the expression of their own caste brethren. Such incidence of suppression is often subtle but recurrent within the dalit community. The dalit public sphere lacks confidence and hence it channelises certain expressions and ignores certain others. The dalit community is building internet communities that are hospitable to non-critical identity-based

matters. They circulate those expressions that are based either on the narratives of dalit victimhood or of caste atrocities around which the narratives of victimhood are built. Such expression is important, but they are wanting in their theoretical elevation. Unfortunately, such critical expressions get suppressed under the weight of the logic of a paternalistic morality. This gets played out in a subtle manner in the exclusive dalit seminars and conferences. One often hears the following paternalistic/patriarchal voice "Do not criticise our own people, it is an internal matter, others will take advantage of our dissent". Such a regressive communitarian ethics and morality provides the basis for the "overlapping consensus" among some dalits who seek to insulate dalit practice and thinking from any valid internal criticism.

Good speech and the resultant expression as a virtue cannot be taken as a moral resource that is naturally available to any caste group. In fact, it has to be acquired through a robust process involving inner legislation and self-reflection. In the political field, dalit leaders often have to supress their expression. This auto-suppression results from the need to tailor their expression in ways that do not expose the conceited expressions of their party bosses. Ductility and adjustment thus form the basis of the subjective reason which these dalit leaders then put to profitable use. They can continue to be recipient of their party's patronage. Such suppression of expression involves a double escape for the dalit – while escaping from freedom of expression they actually intend to escape from the wrath of party leaders. But in doing so they also escape with the authentic expression that is so necessary to the definition and realisation of a self-respecting being.

Of course there are a few notable exceptions, but the larger argument holds. These auto-suppression points to a difficult dilemma – the transformations at the subjective level within the dalit oppositional consciousness are much slower than the changes in their material position. Their body may express their high social status but their mind, with compromised and compressed expression, undermines their social stature as self-respecting persons.

In fact, experience shows that for some dalits bodily expression can acquire the power of subversion through performitivity, thanks to consumer markets which makes acquisition and adoption to various technologies possible. Thus, a diamond-studded body of a dalit would certainly annoy the upper castes. For want of space, I would not go into different aspects of this question of annoyance. But let me quickly add here that this annoyance has a social purpose, in as much as it subverts the normalised social relationship. This act of sanskritisation tends to create within the victim a negative consciousness of the self that would annoy those who seek to denigrate the dalit bodies in the first instance.

But at the same time, this resignification also assigns a flipside to bodily expressions, in the sense that it can amount to the colonisation of the body. And this very body, for its very subversive articulation, has to depend on the imitation of another idealised body. Similarly, in everyday social life, the process of sanskritisation necessarily produces an incongruence between self-perception and self-expression. The need to imitate others necessarily produces coercive expression. Conversely, it can lead to the containment of a more authentic expression which could be defined in terms of the congruence between self-perception and self-expression. The source of this expression is in the ideal of being simple. The Buddha, M K Gandhi, Jyotirao Phule and (the later) Ambedkar expressed themselves primarily in the simple and not in the spectacular.[6]

Conclusions

In conclusion, we need to once again underline a few points that are necessary for the radical reconfiguration of our thinking about freedom of expression and its implication for the rights of the mind of dalits. As mentioned above, in a liberal democratic system such as India, freedom of expression as an individual right has to be accepted as a necessary condition for creativity which has transformative possibilities. It has to be further acknowledged that the expression of creativity with humility (*vidya vinayena shobhate*, a sanskrit *vachana*) has the promise to route expression in the realm of civility rather than that of legality. In other words, humility can prevent serious discourse from getting short-circuited by interested parties, including the authoritative expressions that were voiced nationally and internationally.

In the present case, what was starkly evident was the authoritative expression that was processed through the act of talking down. The dominant has its origin in the act of individualising expressions. In the ambition to achieve and maintain the dominant status, it becomes necessary to treat expression as self-possession.

Expressions with authoritative power have the ambition to remain dominant. They can retain their discursive dominance only in the company of a mass of ordinary or insignificant expressions, or suppressed and subdued expressions in the public sphere. In order to remain dominant they need to either suppress or subdue others' expressions (of argumentative ideas, creative imaginations, etc) that are constitutive of the rights of mind. One needs to defend this right through an onslaught of "talking down". Talking down necessarily involves a coercive pedagogy. In the recent case the unified expression produced by the urban intellectual elite did involve such a coercive pedagogy which taught, particularly the dalit, how it is in their interests to resolve problems through the power of the mind and not just through legal power. The advice to the dalits that they should deploy discursive or intellectual resources in dealing with contingencies of different kinds may

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have some relevance. However, at the same time it is necessary to offer the same advice to dalit adversaries who are found tormenting the former morally, through the rituals of repetition of the humiliating expression.

Resorting to the legal remedy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for dalits who are interested in the realisation of the life of the mind. They can take the rights of the mind seriously only in the condition where they put greater premium on the expression of the mind and not the body. Bodily expression may help raising their social status but certainly not their human stature. This is not to suggest that they cannot speak through the power of mind; they do. The elite with their dominant expression need to acknowledge this. Similarly it is also necessary for dalits to engage with others more with the power of argument or discursive power and less with legal power. Dalits do require interlocutors for the realisation of the life of the mind. They should not be left alone to their isolation. In this regard, for the urban elite who are interested in making expression egalitarian, Kierkegaard is not an ideal reference point. If he is, then they, like him, would necessarily choose to walk alone without the need for a concerned interlocutor. Let us hope that they, in the future, will walk and talk together with the dalit, in fact with the rest of the subalterns.

NOTES

1 Personal communication with Sundar Sarukkai.

2 There are several songs recordings in CD and widely circulated in the dalit Marathi public sphere in Maharashtra which will substantiate this.

3 This is the public memory of Nagsevan, Aurangabad Maharashtra, where different educational institutions founded by Babasaheb Ambedkar are situated .

4 This is a big list but prominent among them are Kumud Pawde, Urmila Pawar, Pradnya Pawar, K Satyanarayana, Sanal Mohan, Ramesh Kamble, Anand Teltumble, Umesh Bagale (dalit by conviction), Partha Sarathi Mandal, and Laxmanan.

5 The late Ravi Ranade, who taught at Pune has shared the information that G M Thaware from Nagpur used to do this.

6 This argument is based on a personal communication with Arindam Chakravarty, who teaches Indian philosophy at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

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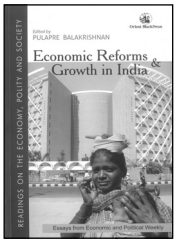

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